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The 'unhappy' men of Japan

Men in their 40s are the most unhappy group in Japan, according to a new survey by the Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. The survey investigated the level of happiness among various groups in Japan.

The results offer important insights into happiness in Japan that should be considered by the government, employers and individuals themselves.

The survey found that men in their 30s rated their level of happiness, on average, at 6.83 out of 10. That dropped to 5.51 among men in their 40s. Eventually, male happiness edged back up among men in their 70s. Men in their 80s rated their happiness as the highest of all genders and age groups, at 8.00. Men in their 40s find the multiple challenges of working, raising children and caring for parents to reduce their overall life satisfaction, a situation that changes dramatically for those in their 70s.

The life arc for men is very different for women. In their 30s, men and women had comparable levels of life satisfaction, but when men dropped down, women stayed roughly the same.

Women's level of happiness was roughly the same in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, peaking in the 60s at 7.32.

In general, both men and women were more happy in their later years than in their 30s through 50s, but the change for men, down and then back up, was more dramatic.

Other interesting results showed that smokers and drinkers were on average less happy than nonsmokers and nondrinkers. People who did not smoke consistently rated themselves as more happy than smokers, and heavy drinkers described their lives as considerably less happy than nondrinkers or light drinkers. Apparently, there is no quick fix to boost happiness.

The survey also found that health, economic security and good family relations were the best indicators of happiness. That result is certainly no surprise, but beyond those basic factors, the salient factor contributing to happiness was reported to be people's being able to contribute to society.

That shift in attitude was likely influenced by the Tohoku tsunami, earthquake and nuclear disasters. Instead of finding satisfaction in free time to pursue hobbies, more Japanese are finding happiness in contributing and connecting to other people.

The implications for improving Japan's level of life satisfaction are clear — more connection.

After last year's visit from Bhutan's royal couple, a country that has pioneered the use of the "gross national happiness" index, the idea that money isn't everything gained currency in Japan.

Government planning, workplaces and individuals should put greater emphasis on finding ways to enhance life satisfaction and increase happiness in meaningful ways.

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